

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

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ACTION HA-05

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C O N F I D E N T I A L DACCA 5481

PASS AID/OFDA

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: UNHCR DREF BG BM
SUBJECT: TROUBLES WITH REPATRIATION OF BURMESE REFUGEES

REF: DACCA 5426

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1. UNDP CHIEF ZAGORIN HAS PROVIDED THE AMBASSADOR WITH ADDITIONAL INFORMATION REGARDING DISTURBANCES AMONG THE BURMESE REFUGEES WHICH HAVE COMPLICATED THE TASK OF REPATRIATION. SINCE THE UN IS PROVIDING INFORMATION TO THE U.S. EMBASSY WHICH IT IS NOT SHARING MORE WIDELY, WE REQUEST THAT THIS INFORMATION BE PROTECTED.

2. THE INITIAL REPATRIATION ON AUGUST 31 WAS COMPLICATED BY THE REFUSAL OF THE BURMESE, WHEN UN AND BANGLADESHI OFFICIALS VISITED THEM ON THE BURMESE SIDE OF THE BORDER ON AUGUST 30, TO ACCEPT MORE THAN 91 OF THE 200 REFUGEES WHOM THE BANGLADESHIS HAD NOMINATED FOR REPATRIATION. THE BURMESE POINTED OUT THAT ALL OF THE REFUGEES DID NOT FIT INTO CATEGORY ONE, PERSONS WHO HAD VALID RESIDENCE PERMITS AND MEMBERS
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OF THEIR IMMEDIATE FAMILIES. THE BANGLADESHIS EXPLAINED THAT THEY HAD INCLUDED OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS IN ORDER TO AVOID BREAKING UP FAMILIES.

3. ON THE EVENING OF AUGUST 30 THE BANGLADESH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES PERSONALLY VISITED THE HUTS OF REFUGEES WHO HAD BEEN SELECTED FOR THE INITIAL REPATRIATION, ASKING

THAT THEY PREPARE TO MOVE TO THE POINT FROM WHICH THEY WOULD DEPART THE FOLLOWING DAY. THE HUSBAND OF A WOMAN WHO HAD BEEN SELECTED WAS AWAY FROM HER HUT AND SHE LOUDLY OBJECTED TO BEING MOVED WITHOUT HIM. A COMMOTION AMONG THE REFUGEES RESULTED AND THE COMMISSIONER AND THE SMALL POLICE DETACHMENT ACCOMPANYING HIM WERE ATTACKED. THE POLICE WERE UNDER INSTRUCTIONS TO USE NO FORCE BEYOND FIRING IN THE AIR. WHEN THIS DEMONSTRATION WAS INADEQUATE TO MAINTAIN ORDER, THE POLICE WITHDREW AND THE COMMISSIONER, WHO HAD BEEN BEATEN UP, FLED INTO THE NEARBY RICE PADDIES. THE BANGLADESH AUTHORITIES, NEVERTHELESS, CONTINUED TO EXERCISE RESTRAINT AND DID NOT RESPOND FURTHER TO THIS INCIDENT. THE FIRST MOVEMENT OF REFUGEES THE NEXT DAY TOOK PLACE ON SCHEDULE, ALTHOUGH THE NUMBER TO GO WAS ONLY 58. THE UNHCR, WHICH ACCOMPANIED THE REFUGEES, WAS SATISFIED THAT THE REPATRIATION WAS VOLUNTARY.

4. ON SEPTEMBER 7-8 ANOTHER, MORE SEVERE INCIDENT TOOK PLACE. WHILE ACCOUNTS VARY SOMEWHAT IN DETAILS, THE CAUSE OF THE INCIDENT WAS AGITATION ON THE PART OF A GROUP OPPOSING REPATRIATION AGAINST THOSE WHO WERE WILLING TO GO. UN OFFICIALS SAY THAT THE OPPONENTS WERE APPARENTLY AGITATORS WHO WISH TO STOP THE RETURN FLOW. A FIGHT BETWEEN THE TWO GROUPS RESULTED AND THE POLICE WERE FORCED TO INTERVENE AND WERE IN TURN ATTACKED. THIS TIME THE CONFIDENTIAL

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POLICE FIRED AND FROM EIGHT TO TWELVE REFUGEES WERE KILLED AND A NUMBER OF OTHERS WOUNDED BEFORE ORDER RESTORED TO THE CAMP.

5. BOTH BANGLADESH AND UN OFFICIALS RECOGNIZE THAT THE RAMIFICATIONS OF THESE INCIDENTS COULD BE QUITE SERIOUS IN CONNECTION WITH THE REPATRIATION WHICH IS PLANNED. MUCH DEPENDS UPON WHAT SUCCESS THE OPPONENTS OF REPATRIATION HAVE HAD IN INTIMIDATING THE OTHER REFUGEES.

6. ZAGORIN REPORTS THAT THERE HAS BEEN NO TROUBLE SO FAR AMONG REFUGEES ON THE BURMESE SIDE OF THE BORDER. THE BURMESE OFFICIALS HAVE DEALT WITH THEM WITH GREAT FIRMNESS AND ZAGORIN DOUBTS THAT A DISTURBANCE SUCH AS THAT WHICH TOOK PLACE ON THE BANGLADESHI SIDE WOULD BE PERMITTED TO HAPPEN.

7. UNHCR REPRESENTATIVE KOHOUT PLANS TO VISIT THE BANGLADESHI CAMPS TO SURVEY THE SITUATION BEGINNING ON SEPTEMBER 11. END CONFIDENTIAL

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8. THE GOVERNMENT OF BANGLADESH ISSUED A PRESS NOTE ON SEPTEMBER 8 WHICH READ AS FOLLOWS: QUOTE. IN THE BURMESE REFUGEE CAMP NO. 2 AT KUTUPALONG A CLASH AMONGST THE REFUGEES ON 8TH SEPTEMBER ESCALATED INTO DESTRUCTIVE MOB VIOLENCE WITH LETHAL WEAPONS. WHEN THE OFFICIALS AND LAW ENFORCING PERSONNEL WERE ENGAGED IN CONTROLLING THE SITUATION, THEY WERE ALSO ATTACKED BY THE VIOLENT MOB CAUSING INJURY TO A NUMBER OF LAW ENFORCING PERSONNEL. THEREAFTER FIRING WAS RESORTED TO IN SELF DEFENSE WHICH RESULTED IN DEATH OF EIGHT PERSONS AND INJURY TO SIX OTHERS. THE SITUATION IN THE CAMP IS NOW NORMAL. AN ENQUIRY HAS BEEN ORDERED. UNQUOTE.
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